

Questions for Mayor Fuller at Thursday's meeting.

1. First, we'd like you to address the concerns and requests posed in the *NewVision* letter we sent in February, and to which you kindly agreed to respond. [Insert link] (We acknowledge that the Zoning Redesign process has changed and become more nuanced, since then.)

2. In May 2018, you asserted "*The Washington Street project will be different from past efforts....*" And that "*This is the genuine real deal of listening to people and creating the zoning based on that.*" After "listening" and creating the *Washington Street Vision Plan*, however, the "drop-in zoning" that was supposed to implement it was abandoned. Instead, we were told that zoning would be done piece-meal as part of Zoning Redesign. Recently, ZR has undergone a re-orientation and is focusing on Village Centers. To gain consensus to rezone Newtonville Center, land-use attorney Peter Harrington has revived the idea of drop-in zoning, formalizing grass-roots ideas into an amendment for Village Center Districts. Would you consider it as new zoning for Newtonville Center and relevant parts of the *Washington Street Vision Plan*?

In a nutshell, the proposal would: 1) limit the basic building to two stories, residential above the first floor (as in present zone). 2) Allow another story, as of right, if low-income housing is included (new) 3) Allow additional floor area, as of right, if a pitched roof is included (new).

3. To cope with the problem of rampant, over-priced teardowns, would it be possible to deal with this by reforming our current zoning tools (Floor-area-ratio, setbacks, and lot coverage)? Why or why not? Please answer considering City Council President Albright's suggestion: *If we want to stop building very large homes that replace the old ones, we need to amend the zoning ordinance to require developers to build new homes in the character of the size and scale of the existing neighborhood. Maybe if we do this - mandate that new homes meet the scale of the existing homes - it will take away the incentive to tear them down in the first place. What are your thoughts on this idea—perhaps maintaining the footprint of the existing building?*

4. We believe that there was never a vote of the whole City Council, a ballot measure, or a scientific survey of the public that would have created a mandate for a root-and-branch rezoning of the whole City. Instead, there was a rushed straw vote in a single committee, unannounced on its agenda. Is that a legitimate means of setting Zoning Redesign's large goals?

5. The phrases "transit-oriented development" (TOD) and "affordable housing" are often employed as facts, when, they are really hypotheses. We need realistic concepts and metrics for evaluating these potentials. Regarding (TOD), as was pointed out to Councilor Crossley in our last meeting, we won't know, until we've emerged from the pandemic, whether Newtonville's new developments will house many people using mass-transit. The pandemic has incentivized corporations to relocate to less dense and cheaper locations and allow more workers to work from home, thus radically changing commuting behavior. ZAP, Planning, and the *Comprehensive Plan* all rely heavily on TOD. But ridership on the Commuter Rail is down to 12% of pre-pandemic levels (as of last November), Green Line ridership down to 33%, and buses down to 80%, so, shouldn't we consider altering our plans to:

- a) Emphasize sites along the Green Line (not the Commuter Rail) for new TOD construction, since it runs many times more trips per day through the wealthiest and least racially diverse parts of Newton?
- b) De-emphasize mass-transit overall, and do more to encourage people, the City, and local companies to drive electric and hybrid vehicles?

**Affordable Housing** The ultimate effect of Newtonville's large, new developments has been to gentrify and make our housing stock more expensive. For instance, even the "affordable" units at Trio (at 80% of AMI) are hundreds of dollars (\$700 and \$350, respectively, for one- and two-bedroom apartments) more expensive than our naturally affordable housing, while the market-rate ones are even more exorbitant.

**Racial justice** Most of Newton's subsidized, officially affordable housing is priced for households making up to 80% of AMI (~\$80K a year for a 2-person family, ~\$100K for four). However, *The Boston Globe's* "Spotlight" team reported a few years ago that African-Americans and foreign-born black households in the Greater Boston Area have a median income of ~\$40,000/year. Isn't it unrealistic to think that such housing (80% AMI) could be a source of housing justice for large numbers of them? Relatedly, what can Zoning Redesign do to provide housing for low-income people making 50% AMI or less? And, how can it provide housing ownership for middle-class people making \$120,000 per household—ostensibly by allowing the building of housing units at ~\$500,000?

**6. 40B safe harbor** Currently, Chapter 40B, allows developers to avoid complying with local zoning ordinances, unless municipalities reach the law's "safe harbor" threshold. Once Newton's large developments "in the pipeline" acquire building permits, we will be at or very close to that threshold. The exercise of 40B safe harbor would give our government and citizens more power over developers by requiring new developments to adhere to our current zoning and other locally-decided parameters regarding size and massing of buildings and the proportion of affordable housing units. If we surpass this threshold, would you invoke "safe harbor?"